

O 191225Z AUG 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0916
INFO RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC 0875
RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHINGTON DC
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002425

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/RA, AND SCA/A

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: Election Preparations in RC-North: A Message to Governor Atta

REF: KABUL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador Eikenberry warned Balkh Governor Mohammad Atta Noor that any violence over election outcomes would shape the international community's view on its presence in Afghanistan. The Ambassador called on the governor to use his prestige and position to serve as a ?voice of reason? during what may be a very emotional post-election period. Atta was non-committal, replying that the region's people will accept the results if the elections are perceived to be fair and transparent. ISAF and ANSF officials at the RC-North regional elections Operations Coordination Center confirmed ANSF forces are deploying to open 1,810 election centers. They predicted that 54 ?high threat? election centers in Kunduz, Ghormach and Baghlan which serve 2.6% of the northern region's 4 million registered voters will probably not open. End Summary

¶2. (SBU) During an August 15 visit to Balkh provincial capital Mazar-e-Sharif, Ambassador Eikenberry discussed election preparations with the local PRT and RC-North commanders, with regional Operations Coordination Center Afghan National Army (ANA), Afghan National Police (ANP) and National Directorate of Security (NDS) officials, and with Governor Atta. Septel will detail Ambassador's visits to USAID-funded agricultural development projects and Governor Atta's request for a U.S. commitment to fund substantial additional infrastructure development projects in Balkh province.

¶3. (SBU) In an unclassified briefing with media present, RC-North Commander General Vollmer called the pre-election security situation in Kunduz province and the newly incorporated Gormach district of Faryab province ?challenging? in light of a recent upsurge in insurgent activity and advised that an increase in ANP forces throughout the northern region would support ISAF stabilization efforts. On election preparation, Vollmer said that, of 1,865 designated polling stations in the RC-North area, 1,805 are on track to be opened in time for elections. The remaining 60 stations, located in Taliban controlled regions of Kunduz, Baghlan and Ghormach, serve only 2.6% of RC-North's roughly 4 million registered voters. Vollmer confirmed that, if they choose, these voters will be able to access neighboring polling stations in secure areas.

Regional Operations Coordination Center

¶4. (SBU) In a briefing at Mazar's Regional Operations Coordination Center (OCCR), ANA 209th Corps Commander General Murad Ali Murad and 303rd Pamir Zone Commander Major General Mujtaba Patang briefed Ambassador on security preparations for the August 20 elections, highlighting close ANA, ANP and NDS coordination with ISAF on information and intelligence sharing, analysis, and dissemination over the past two months. ANSF forces, he said, are now beginning coordinated deployment from provincial centers to districts to open 1,810 of the originally planned 1,864 election stations throughout the region. (Note: This contrasts with General Vollmer's projection that 1,805 election stations will be opened.) The remaining 54

election centers (22 in Kunduz, 18 in Gormach and 14 in Baghlan) are considered high threat and will likely not be opened.

¶5. (SBU) NDS northern region chief Faizullah anticipated that Taliban insurgents will attempt to disrupt elections at a number of election locations via intimidation and by RPG and suicide bombing attacks. Acting on intelligence that the TB had placed cells in Baghlan and Ghormach, the OCCR has been able to ?collapse their plans.? He hoped that OCCR coordinated countermeasures, including establishing five ANA checkpoints in Baghlan, can reduce the number of high threat election posts from 55 to 40. He also noted the possibility of demonstrations in Jowzjan, Sar-e-pol and Faryab provinces by followers of General Dostum and predicted that such demonstrations could turn violent if the general does not return before elections are held. (Note: Dostum returned to Afghanistan on August 16. End note)

¶6. (U) In a follow-on press conference, the ANA and ANP generals repeated their assurances of closely coordinated ANSF and ISAF efforts to ensure that elections in the north go smoothly and General Vollemer praised the performance and teamwork of ANSF forces. Ambassador said he was impressed with significantly enhanced ANA and ANP capabilities and the improving capacity of the Afghan Border Police (ABP). He called the purpose of his visit to Mazar to consult with Americans serving in civilian and military positions here, to see firsthand how Afghan election preparations are proceeding in the northern provinces, and to show our confidence in both the ISAF mission and the will of the Afghan people to conduct open and fair elections. He concluded that, while elections will likely not be perfect in light of the enormous logistical challenges involved, if a majority of registered voters exercise their franchise, it will represent an important defeat for the insurgency.

Governor Atta on Possible Post Election Demonstrations

¶7. (SBU) In a meeting with Governor Atta and his senior provincial staff, the Ambassador stressed that elections will be a challenging exercise given Afghanistan's legacy of 30 years of internal conflict, low literacy and challenging logistics. He said that the U.S. and international governments back the IEC-GIRoA decision that no polling station will be opened unless it can be fully secured by ANSF forces and candidates who have mobilized local support are satisfied they will have the opportunity to place monitors at polls. The Ambassador stressed that the U.S. has neither a favored candidate nor a preference for a one- or two-round process.

¶8. (SBU) The Ambassador expressed concern that uncertainty over election outcomes could lead to violent demonstrations. He noted that all major candidates have publicly condemned any resort or incitement to violence by their followers and that any such violence would shape international community's views about their presence in Afghanistan. ?I know I can count on you as a voice of reason during a very emotional period,? the Ambassador concluded. ?People will accept the results if the elections are perceived to be fair and transparent.? Atta replied. ?If not, people will protest.?

¶9. (SBU) Provincial Council Chairman and Atta protege Farhad Azimi noted in a later aside to PRToff that he does not foresee trouble, and noted that Karzai spoke positively about Atta during a recent campaign rally in Kandahar, at which he said he would ask Atta to stay on as Balkh governor should he win re-election. In response to a private question from the Ambassador about his post-election plans should Karzai win, Atta said he might accept Karzai's outreached hand and stay on, albeit begrudgingly.

Comment

¶10. (SBU) With five-years tenure as governor, Atta is one of the longest-serving of President Karzai's provincial appointees. His own endorsement of opposition presidential candidate Abdullah as well as his recent outright rejection of Ministry of Interior instructions to replace provincial police officials has strained Atta's relation with the Karzai administration. And Atta's oft

voiced view that the more secure northern provinces deserve a bigger share of donors' development spending that has been ?unfairly? concentrated in the insecure South and East (Septel) has sustained frictions with local PRT and RC commanders. Though his response was non-committal, Atta took on board the Ambassador's request that he use his personal prestige and influence to temper any post-election tendencies to violent demonstration.

EIKENBERY